

****ATTENTION****

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MOOSE

The moose (*Alces alces*) is one of Washington's most spectacular, but least-seen big-game animals. It is restricted in its occurrence to the northern and north-easternmost part of the state—mountainous areas which connect to the rugged wilds of the mountains of British Columbia and Idaho.

Description

Washington's moose belong to a subspecies called "Shira's moose" which is physically smaller than its northern cousins. Adults of both sexes are dark brown and long-legged. Males and females have prominent muzzles and a large flap of fur-covered skin that hangs beneath the throat. Males display broad, flat, palmated antlers tipped with points, their numbers varying with age. Yearling males have forked antlers; after five years, the familiar palmated rack has developed. Antlers are shed during the winter. Adult males weigh between 850 and 1,100 lbs.; adult females between 600 and 800 lbs. The record antler spread is 77 5/8 inches.

Distribution

In North America, moose are found from Alaska to Newfoundland, with large populations extending south in the Rocky Mountains into Utah and Colorado. In Washington, moose inhabit parts of Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Stevens and Spokane counties. The two major populations are found in the Selkirk Mountains and near Mt. Spokane.

Moose prefer forested habitat where bogs, marshes and lakes provide them with aquatic vegetation and willow, a principal component of their diet. In Washington, this habitat is found in the mid-elevation forest, between 1,500 and 4,000 feet.

Life History

Moose occur singly or in small groups. Cows are sometimes seen in small groups but calf sightings are rare. Bull moose are most often seen as lone individuals. The animals are most commonly seen near water, where they feed during the summer, on aquatic plants and their favorite

forage item, willow. During winter, moose feed extensively on shoots and bark of willow and aspen.

Breeding occurs in the fall and calves are born in June. Youngsters nurse for four months and by two years of age have achieved nearly 80 percent of their adult size and weight.

Management

The Washington Department of Wildlife maintains two management areas for moose, the Selkirk Mountain Area, in Pend Oreille County and Mt. Spokane Area, in Spokane County. The current moose population in Washington is estimated at 185 animals, with the stocks growing. Hunting has been allowed only since 1979. Moose permits are issued on a very limited basis—only six will be drawn in 1988. Successful applicants are restricted to one Special Moose Permit per lifetime. For more information, consult the Washington Department of Wildlife brochure, *Mountain Goat, Sheep, Moose, Cougar and Lynx Hunting Seasons*.

